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A Closer Look at Interracial Adoption

According to Judy Fenster, Assistant Professor at the School of Social Work at Adelphi University in Garden City, New York, “transracial adoption (TRA), is defined as the adoption of a child of a different race or ethnicity from his adoptive parents”. In the research of this issue, there has been evidence of overwhelming support for the practice of transracial or interracial adoption; however, there is a portion of the African American population that does not support the interracial adoption of black children by white parents and refer to the practice as “cultural genocide” (46). They feel that white parents adopting black children will be bad for black culture because it will confuse the racial identity of the children, and that this is enough to say that interracial adoption should not be practiced in America (Chimezie 296). The majority of the population agrees with transracial adoption because they believe the benefits of giving children a home outweighs the alleged risks. Although some may argue that interracial adoption should be abolished because it destroys the racial identity of the child, this is not true because research shows that white families will not downplay racism with their child, interracial adoptions do not cause low self-esteem, most interracially adopted children will not grow up in a racist neighborhood or school, it gives children a loving home, it further discourages racism, and it gives infertile couples the chance to raise children.

In 2004, Fenster developed a questionnaire that she administered to 600 American social workers (both black and white) to find out their opinions regarding transracial adoption. Her findings were that the majority of the 600 people leaned positively towards transracial adoption (53). Likewise, in the fall 2002 semester at East Carolina University, 188 undergraduate students were given a similar questionnaire by Mark Whatley. These students represented every race, religion, gender, and classification at the school, and “the lowest possible score on the **Attitudes Toward Transracial Adoption** Scale was 15; the highest possible score was 105; the midpoint, 60. The average score of the 188 respondents was 29.68 reflecting very positives **attitudes toward transracial adoption**” (Whatley 323). Although there seems to be overwhelming favor in the general public regarding interracial adoption, there is still a small outcry from a few African Americans that think interracial adoption is not a good thing (Chimezie 296). According to Amuzie Chimezie’s research, the main arguments these African Americans have against interracial adoption are that the white families will play down racism, the child will experience “permanent reminders of negative exceptionality,” and the child will grow up in predominantly white and racist neighborhoods and schools (Chimezie 299).

The argument that white families will play down racism with their black child is flawed because it is safe to assume that racism is universal and will always be around; therefore, there is no reason for a family to downplay racism and tell their black child that they will never experience prejudice, and there is no evidence to support this claim. Whether a person is black, white, Asian, or Hispanic-they all will experience some form of racism in their lives, and the fact that they could be raised by ethnically different parents does not make them ill-prepared to deal with that. The second argument that the child will experience “permanent reminders of negative exceptionality” is also untrue. A study was done by Ruth G. McRoy in which sixty adoptive families were interviewed and participated in tests. Thirty of these families were white and had adopted black children, while the other thirty families were black and had also adopted black children. The purpose of the study was to see if there was a difference in the self-esteem and/or racial identity of these children.

“No significant differences were found in the self-esteem scores of the two respondent groups. The mean Total Positive Overall Self-Esteem Score for transracially adopted black children was 348.9 as compared to 348.7 for inracially adopted black children. Thus, all sixty black children, regardless of adoptive setting, were nearly identical in their reports of self-worth” (McRoy 524).

The third argument that the child will grow up in a white, racist neighborhood and attend a white, racist school is not valid because there is no evidence to support that it is true. One can only assume that just because a black child is adopted by white family, that that means they will be raised in an all white neighborhood or attend an all white school. The fact of the matter is that most white families do not live in neighborhoods free of black influence and most white families do not send their children to schools that are overwhelmingly white schools, though there are some that do. Kristen E. Johnston, author of “Mothers’ Racial, Ethnic, and Cultural Socialization of Transracially Adopted Asian Children,” points out in her argument that earlier psychological studies do indeed find that transracial adoptive parents did try to convey a “colorblind” attitude to their children and downplay racism as Chimezie suggests, but in more recent studies, research has shown that adoptive mothers especially have been trying to incorporate cultural socialization in which they teach their children the importance of embracing their own heritage and ethnicity, further disproving the opposition’s third main point (Johnston 391).

The first main point in the argument favoring transracial adoption is that it gives children a loving home. Referring back to the experiment done by Ruth G. McRoy, one can see that the scores of 348.9 and 348.7 for transracially adopted and inracially adopted black children respectively on the Tennessee Self Concept Scale are very close to the average score for the group of 626 participants used to reflect the “norm” of the population, which is 345.6 (McRoy 524). This goes to show that the children being adopted; whether by black or white families, are feeling as good about themselves as the majority of the population, and it is safe to say that this means they are happy and content with being where they are. If not adopted, these children will grow up in foster care and “these homes and institutions are believed to produce behavior problems and general maladjustment” (Chimezie 297). If there is even a remote chance that a child will develop a behavior problem or not be properly adjusted to live and function normally in the adult world because of their upbringing in foster care, there is no argument strong enough to deny them a home just because they are black, and the family that wants them to be their child is white. There is no evidence to support that a white family will provide a less loving home than a traditional black family.

As aforementioned, racism is universal and will probably never vanish altogether; however, interracial adoption helps to advocate against racism. If any family is considering adopting a child that is ethnically different than them, it would not be hasty to assume that they are not prejudiced. The process of becoming a foster parent/family is a very long and difficult process, so the chances of some white supremacist becoming a foster parent just to adopt a black child to make him/her a slave is very slim. That being said, interracial adoption further deters racism because it gives the family and the child a whole new perspective on a different race and culture and it promotes acceptance and living in harmony with one another. As Johnston mentioned in her research, most adoptive families do not practice a “colorblind” parenting style anymore, and adoptive mothers today are encouraging cultural socialization and pushing for their children to study, learn, and understand their own heritage, culture, and way of life (Johnston 391).

The third main point in this argument is that interracial adoption provides infertile couples the chance to raise a family. It is common knowledge that a lot of adoptive mothers/families are infertile and cannot have children of their own, so they turn to adoption as a healthy alternative. The research done is this study has shown that families of all different ethnic backgrounds are willing and ready to provide happy loving homes to children of varying ethnic backgrounds as well, and that these children are happy and confident while in these homes. The people who are against interracial adoption are denying infertile couples the right to raise a child or children simply because of the color of their skin. Though the opposition claims that it is for the best interest of the child, and for black culture as a whole, being against transracial adoption seems to be racist in of itself.

In closing, interracial adoption is becoming more prevalent in the adoption world, and this research goes to show that it is nothing to be feared or to go against. Those who are against transracial adoption claim it is because the adoptive parents will downplay racism with their child-a practice that will cripple them socially, the child will be constantly reminded of how different they are, thus making them less self-confident, and the child will grow up in a white, racist neighborhood, and attend a white, racist school. All of these arguments have been refuted by evidence from the research of numerous scholars presented earlier. Those who are for transracial adoption have three reasons of their own. These people claim it will provide loving homes for foster children, it will help advocate against racism, and it will give infertile couples another chance at raising a family. Unlike the opposition, the three points chosen by this side of the issue all hold true using the same research. Needless to say, interracial adoption has no major problems, and it is a healthy alternative for those who cannot have children, and it adds another option for those who want to adopt.

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